

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NASSAU 1818

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, BF
SUBJECT: ILLEGAL HAITIANS - CONVERSATION WITH MINISTER ROLLE

REF A. STATE 206510 B. NASSAU 1775

SUMMARY. MINISTER ROLLE DESCRIBED VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION PROGRAM AND ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS UNDERWAY IN EFFORT TO SOLVE ILLEGAL HAITIAN IMMIGRANT PROBLEM. HE EMPHASIZED THAT GCOB IS ATTEMPTING TO PREVENT HAITIANS FROM GOING TO THE US ILLEGALLY FROM THE BAHAMAS TO AVOID REPATRIATION. BECAUSE OF NEGOTIATIONS UNDERWAY WITH GOH, ROLLE WOULD PREFER THAT A HIGH LEVEL VISIT NOT TAKE PLACE AT THIS TIME. HE RECOMMENDED LOW-KEY, UNOFFICIAL ENFORCEMENT AND INTELLIGENCE COOPERATION. WE WOULD APPRECIATE LATEST ASSESSMENT FROM WASHINGTON ON EXTENT OF PROBLEM IN US. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING UP ON MY MEETING EARLIER THIS WEEK WITH MINISTER ADDERLEY (REF B) TO REVIEW THE ILLEGAL HAITIAN PROBLEM AND TO RAISE QUESTIONS ALONG THE LINES REQUESTED BY THE DEPT IN REF (A), DCM AND I MET ON AUG 25 WITH MIN OF LABOR AND HOME AFFAIRS DARRELL ROLLE. ROLLE WAS APPRECIATIVE OF PROBLEMS CREATED IN THE US BY ILLEGAL HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS AND WAS POSITIVE, FORTHCOMING AND FRANK.

2. ROLLE SAID GCOB IS REPATRIATING ABOUT 200 HAITIANS A WEEK TO HAITI
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UNDER A VOLUNTARY PROGRAM ARRANGED WITH GOH. (THIS CONFIRMS INFO GIVEN

DCM EARLIER BY ACTING IMMIGRATION DIRECTOR ENOCH BACKFORD). HE SAID HAITIAN CONSUL IN NASSAU IS COOPERATING WITH THE VOLUNTARY PROGRAM AND IS SUCCESSFULLY PERSUADING ILLEGAL HAITIANS THAT THEY SHOULD RETURN TO HAITI VOLUNTARILY RATHER THAN RISK ENFORCED DEPORTATION LATER. REPATRIATION IS BY BAHAMIAN SHIPS AND PLANS AT BAHAMIAN

EXPENSE, ROLLE SAID. ROLLE SAID THE GCOB IS PRESENTLY NEGOTIATING WITH GOH TO ARRIVE AT A FORMAL AGREEMENT NCOMPASSING REPATRIATION IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE THE PROGRAM WORK BETTER.

3. IN COMMENTING ON HOW DIFFICULT THE PROBLEM IS, ROLLE OBSERVED THAT HAITIANS CONTINUE TO ENTER THE BAHAMAS ILLEGALLY. HE SAID LAST WEEK 75 WERE DETAINED ATTEMPTING TO ENTER INAGUA AND 25 AT ELEUTHERA. ILLEGALS INTERCEPTED ATTEMPTING TO ENTER ARE IMMEDIATELY DEPORTED, HE SAID.

4. ROLLE SAID THAT THE GCOB IS MAKING A STRONG ENFORCEMENT EFFORT TO PREVENT HAITIANS FROM GOING TO THE US TO AVOID REPATRIATION. HE CITED SPECIFICALLY CASES IN FREEPORT WHERE AUTHORITIES HAVE STOPPED SEVERAL BOATLOADS OF HAITIANS AND DETAINED THEM FOR DEPORTATION RATHER THAN PERMIT THEM TO GO ON TO THE US. HE SAID BAHAMAS DEFENSE FORCE BOATS AND POLICE SURVEILLANCE AIRCRAFT INTERCEPT ILLEGAL BOATS WHENEVER POSSIBLE IN BAHAMIAN WATERS, INCLUDING THOSE CARRYING POTENTIAL ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS. IN A FURTHER EFFORT AT ENFORCEMENT, ROLLE SAID GCOB WAS INSTITUTING A PROGRAM TO REQUIRE SMALL BOATS OF THE SIZE USUALLY USED TO SMUGGLE ALIENS FROM HAITI TO PUT IN AT INAGUA BEFORE SAILING FURTHER NORTH INTO THE BAHAMAS. THIS SYSTEM HE SAID, WOULD ALLOW GREATER CONTROL OF THESE TYPES OF BOATS. HE SAID THEY ALSO HAVE A CREW-SIZE CONTROL PROGRAM FOR BAHAMIAN BOATS FOR THE SAME PURPOSE.

5. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUERY ABOUT THE ADVISABILITY OF A VISIT BY A CONFIDENTIAL

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HIGH-LEVEL US OFFICIAL, POSSIBLY FROM IMMIGRATION, MINISTER ROLLE SAID HE WOULD PREFER THAT SUCH A VISIT NOT TAKE PLACE, AT LEAST AT THIS TIME, HE SAID HE FEARED THAT A HIGH-LEVEL VISIT MIGHT CAUSE THE GOH TO BELIEVE THAT THE GCOB AND THE USG WERE GANGING UP ON IT AND THERE FORE DAMAGE THE CHANCE OF SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR FOR THE THE GCOB-GOH FORMAL REPATRIATION AGREEMENT HE MENTIONED EARLIER. HE REPEATED HIS IDEA THAT A WORKING VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION PROGRAM IS THE ULTIMATE ANSWER BOTH FOR THE US AND THE GCOB. HE SUGGESTED THAT A MORE USEFUL APPROACH AT THIS TIME MIGHT BE FOR US COAST GUARD AND ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS TO WORK INFORMALLY WITH THEIR BAHAMIAN COUNTERPARTS TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION AND COORDINATE EFFORTS TO STOP THE MOVEMENT OF ILLEGALS. HE SUGGESTED POSSIBLY SOMETHING ALONG THE LINE OF COOPERATION WE NOW ENJOY IN THE EFFORT AGAINST NARCOTICS.

6. COMMENT: MINISTER ROLLE IS A POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PERSON WHO UNDERSTANDS THE POLITICAL PROBLEM CREATED IN THE US BY THE RECENT INFLUX OF HAITIANS. HE CLEARLY WANTS US TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT IS ALSO A POLITICAL PROBLEM HERE, WHICH HE BELIEVES THE GCOB HAS GONE A LONG WAY TOWARDS DEFUSING THROUGH THE VOLUNTARY

REPATRIATION PROGRAM.

7. ALTHOUGH I DO NOT HAVE EVIDENCE, IT IS MY IMPRESSION THAT THE ILLEGAL MOVEMENT OF HAITIANS TO THE US FROM THE BAHAMAS HAS DIMINISHED DRAMATICALLY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS. ENOCH BACKFORD OF IMMIGRATION AND ALEXANDER PAUL, THE HAITIAN CONSUL HERE, THIS WEEK BOTH TOLD THE DCM THAT THEY BELIEVE THE FLOW HAS REDUCED TO VERY FEW. ANY INFORMATION INS OR ANY OTHER USG AGENCY HAS ON NUMBERS OF ILLEGAL ALIENS NOW GOING TO THE US FROM THE BAHAMAS WOULD BE MOST APPRECIATED. SUCH INFORMATION WOULD BE SUPPORTIVE IN OUR CONTINUING EFFORT TO SENSITIZE THE GCOB TO THE FACT THAT THEY SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEM AT OUR EXPENSE.

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